# FRANCES STOREY'S HAPPIEST CHRISTMAS

By HILDA RICHMOND

"Papa says one of you girls must accept Aunt Caroline's invitation for the holidays," said Mrs. Storey, with a troubled look on her motherly face. "I am sorry to have you go to that dead-alive little village, but you know papa seldom says 'must,' so we will have to make the best of it. Now which will it be?"

"It's simply impossible for me to go, mamma," said Margaret, whirling lightly around on the piano stool. I've practiced for weeks on this Christmas music and the entertainment could not go on without my playing. Frances or Kate will have to sacrifice this time, and it's only fair, for they have not so much on their minds as I have."

"Why, Margaret, my time is as precious as yours," said Kate, looking up from the new dress she was finishing, "and besides I am going to sing at the party next week."

"I might go if someone would finish dressing those dolls for the tree down at the mission. Poor Aunt Carrie must be lonesome since her only daughter went to Oregon to live and I'd like to see her again. She used to let us make little pies and muss around in her clean kitchen, and at home Sarah never allowed us to spoil her domain," said Frances.

"I'll attend to the dolls," said Margaret, promptly, "and help you pack your trunk if you need help. I have no doubt you will have a good time at Cedar Hill, for Aunt always thought so much of you."

In spite of her 19 years the whole family considered Frances a mere child and no one but the mother thought it made any difference that she was to spend the holidays in a lonely house with Aunt Caroline, instead of having a share in the city celebrations, which she so much enjoyed. Mrs. Storey slipped a number of packages marked "open on Christmas eve" in the big trunk and provided a stylish traveling dress, but her heart welled as the trim figure disappeared amid a chorus of farewells and the noise of the busy station. Mr. Storey gave his daughter some bright gold pieces with the instructions to spend them as she liked, but Frances reflected that she was likely to bring them home gain for want of a chance to invest in anything except goods found in a country store at Cedar Hill.

It was late in the afternoon before the brakeman announced "Cedar Hill," and Frances was surprised to see a number of passengers get off. "Is this really Cedar Hill?" she asked of an old man near.

"It really is," he answered with a smile. "If I am not mistaken, you are Fanny Storey that used to play with my granddaughters. Don't you remember Grandfather Devon?"

"Of course I do. How are Nellie and Ruth? The reason I thought this was not Cedar Hill is because the town when I knew it, was only a little place, and this looks like a city."

"We've had a boom since those days. Here, Horace, help Miss Storey with her luggage. I can take care of myself. This is the young lady who used to play with the girls a dozen years ago, but I don't suppose she remembers the freckled boy who built playhouses for her."

"Yes I do," said Frances, shaking hands with the elegantly dressed young man. "You always built the very nicest houses of any boys we knew. Mr. Devon, and I still recollect them with pleasure."

All this time they were leaving the train and looking for Aunt Caroline, who evidently had not received the letter announcing Frances' visit, for she was not in sight. "We'll take you to Mrs. Howard's, for she lives close to us," said the young man, loading himself with "Sissy's" baggage. "You never would find the old house without a guide, for factories and stores and churches have sprung up in such profusion that it is entirely overshadowed. Your aunt and grandfather and some more of the conservative old residents bewail the new order of things as much as they would a national calamity, but I must confess that I like to see paved streets where we used to make mud pies."

"I wish mamma and the girls could see me now," said Frances, gazing at the latest styles in dresses in a store window. "Mamma cried to think of my coming to this out-of-the-way place and I very nearly started with only a satchel, thinking I would only need a few clothes. We write and get letters from Cedar Hill so seldom that I never dreamed of the change I see to-day."

"You'll be glad enough you brought your trunk, for things are lively during the holidays."

"What is that beautiful building we are coming to?" inquired Frances, as they neared a stone structure that might have graced a city.

"That is the public library," said Mr. Devon. "I suppose you have a supply of books in that big trunk for fear there would be nothing to read in our town. I won't mention it to the citizens though, for fear they might put you on the first train for home. There is Mrs. Howard on the porch. She knows you."

The days that followed were busy ones for Frances. She sent a telegram telling of her safe arrival and found only time for the briefest notes till after Christmas, on account of the many places to go and the delightful things to do. Aunt Caroline enjoyed the company and the frolics to the utmost and urged her niece to make the old house as lively as possible. The girls and boys she played with years before flocked to see her, bringing friends with them, till Frances declared this the nicest visit she ever had in her life.

"You and I are the committee on dolls for the poor children's Christmas tree," said Horace, coming into the parlor where Frances was putting up holly for the great day. "Imagine waiting till three days before the twenty-fifth before looking after dolls! But it's not their fault, for Miss Gray would have attended to it if her mother had not taken sick. Come, get your sunbonnet and we'll make short work of the infants."

"I'm going to buy some candy and fruit for the people at the hospital," said Frances when the dolls were disposed of. "Papa gave me some gold pieces to spend and they are burning holes in my pockets."

"A good idea. I'll go halves, for I feel like celebrating, too."

Over and over again Frances wished the folks at home could see her during the happy holidays. Every letter assured them that she was having a fine time, but it is impossible to put the spirit of good times on paper. The Christmas tree for the Sunday school of Third street church was a complete success and then the young people trooped off to the mission to distribute gifts and candy to the factory people who could not attend "the big church up town."

"Are you homesick, Fanny?" asked Nellie Devon, with an arm around Frances as the gay crowd sat waiting for the clock to strike 12 on Christmas eve in Mrs. Howard's old-fashioned parlor. "I don't want to remind you of home or make you sad, but you must have so many pleasant things to do in the city that we never heard about."

"I don't know what they are," laughed Frances. "I think I could give the president information about 'The Strenuous Life' since I've been here. This is the busiest and happiest holiday time I ever had, except that I want all the folks at home to enjoy it, too."

"You must all come to dinner tomorrow—no, to-day—" said Mrs Howard as the young people started home. "It has been so many years since I had such a flock around me that I must make the most of it. I want Frances to have a good time so she will want to come every year."

Frances felt a touch of self-reproach on Christmas morning when she remembered the neat little parcels she was to have opened on the evening before. She had fallen into the happy sleep that visits the pure-hearted without a thought for the lovely time she was having and a little prayer for her family and friends. As she smoothed out the note slipped through the beautiful ring, she smiled to read the tender message—"My Dear Daughter: I hope this will be the happiest Christmas of your life to reward you for giving up your own pleasure to gratify Aunt Caroline. Many happy returns of the day, sweetheart. Mother."

Mrs. Howard found time on Christmas day for a long letter to her brother, in which she said, "You must be prepared to give us your little Fanny, for I am sure Horace Devon has persuaded her that Cedar Hill is a good place to spend a lifetime. He is a rising young architect and has a fine place in the city, to which he goes every day. This may sound like strange tales, but I did not want the news to strike you too suddenly. Of course the young people are not rash enough to make plans far into the future without consulting you, but I can find no fault with their anticipations. Horace is a——"

But Mr. Storey had laid down the letter with a bewildered look that plainly showed his pain and astonishment. His wife expressed no surprise, though tears came into her eyes as she said, "You might have taken a hint from the child's short letters in which she spoke of being perfectly happy. I have been hoping this would be a happy day for her, but I am not quite prepared to say I like the realization of my wishes."

With the light streaming through the stained glass windows on the evergreen and holly wound around the stately pillars of the church and the Christmas music in her ears Frances found it hard to keep her thoughts from the mental picture of the bare little church Cedar Hill had boasted in other days. "Glory to God in the Highest," sang the sweet voices just as the choir in the church at home was doing at that very moment, but there was no homesickness in her heart.

Under cover of her big hymn book Horace Devon softly pressed her slim hand while the ushers seated late arrivals in the little pause that followed the anthem, and she smiled to think her mother's Christmas wish had come true.—Baptist Union.

# MISDIRECTED GENEROSITY

BY JOHN H. RAFFERTY.

Col. Battersly, not having seen his sister in ten years, decided to spend Christmas at her house. A desultory correspondence had made him vaguely aware of the fact that her husband, Calvin Murdock, had grown rich, and that she had two children, a boy and a girl. But he was not prepared for the luxuriant conditions which he found upon entering their splendid home. He was never estranged from his sister, but when she married Murdock the soldier brother had made up his mind that his sister's husband was not "his kind." In frontier barracks and foreign camps, Col. Battersly's life had been lonely. He was a silent, elemental, passionate man, whose rigid habits gave a cold and even hard exterior to a nature essentially tender. Murdock was a man of much smugness, who knew that a Sunday school class does not hurt a man's credit with the bank.

But the Murdocks gave Uncle Battersly a grand welcome. His sister kissed him, the two children gave him their hands with trained graciousness, and the head of the house said: "Welcome to the warrior—see, the conquering hero comes!" This made the old campaigner ill at ease. He blushed like a girl, and thereafter found restraint in the, to him, artificial atmosphere of the grand house. When he went out for a walk Mrs. Murdock said:

"Poor fellow; how he's changed!"

"Out of his element with women and children," growled Murdock.

"What makes his neck so red?" asked the boy.

When the Christmas presents began to arrive, and his sister showed them to him, the colonel suddenly realized that he must buy something for the children. He said nothing about it, but spent half of the next day buying for his niece a French doll, with a complete wardrobe, and a fully equipped steam battleship for his nephew. It was a soldier's choice—love and a child for the little woman, power and war for the little man. "He was very careful about the address, "Mrs. Murdock, 2441 Penrose street."

He wondered why his gifts did not soon appear in the grand array, but said nothing to his sister, showing each day an increasing interest in the accumulating presents in the locked room, and finally, on Christmas eve, late in the day, going back to the store where he had made his purchases to ask what had become of the doll and the warship. It took a long time to find out the right man, but at last a very polite clerk who had been answering questions as fast as a dozen people could ask them, turned to him and said:

"Murdock? What address? Penrose street or Penrose avenue?"

"Are there both?" asked the colonel, as the possible blunder dawned on him.

"Yes; one on the West side, one on the South side. Where did you wish your goods to go?"

Of course, Penrose avenue is on the South side and Penrose street is on the West side, and Col. Battersly had himself made the mistake. The goods had been receipted for, the clerk told him. It was pretty late to attempt getting them back, but they would try. The clerk made some notes, rattled off a few words about the terrible rush, moved off and left the colonel standing dazed in the crowd. He went home, and as a precaution got out of his trunk a strangely carved bracelet, antique, oriental—a noble present, he thought, for his niece; and for his nephew an old, bejeweled war mask—it had been a mandarin's. And he took them to Mrs. Murdock, saying nothing of their great value, and said they were for her girl and her boy. But after dinner that night Mr. Murdock tapped at the colonel's door, saying:

"I hope you won't think of giving those rare curios to the children, colonel. They're worth their weight in money."

"Didn't cost me a cent, Murdock," blurted the soldier. "They're part of the—well, the loot—that is, I picked 'em up in China and—they—the children will appreciate them more as they grow older."

Murdock walked away without answering, but that night the woman told her brother, softly and with evident desire to be grateful, that "papa was so scrupulous, he didn't want the children to receive such presents."

"You know, brother," she said, "he's so conscientious that he thinks you didn't come by them honestly—that is, from his point of view. You won't feel hurt, will you, brother? Papa is so different from you."

So the brother, flushing red, took back his barbaric gifts and went to bed. In the morning, soon after breakfast, he went out of the house, called a cab, and bade the driver take him to 2441 Penrose street. The doll and the battleship had not arrived, and he was going after them. He got out of the cab in a squalid street, and went into the only house in the block. It was a dirty, tumbledown cottage, built below grade and with a sign "For Sale" nailed to the rickety fence. A thin woman, in an old, faded wrapper, came to the door.

"I came to see if—"

"Oh, I knew somebody ud come," she interrupted him. "I knew they wasn't for us, sir—won't you come in?"

He stepped into the dingy room and saw a big-eyed, frail girl of seven fondling the great French doll.

"You see, sir," said the woman, breathless to explain, "the things come while I was out—I work over at the shoe factory, and—my name is Murphy, sir—and when the things come nobody was home, sir, but Mamie and the boy. He's mine, and he's out there now playin' with th' steamboat, and when the wagon came, Mrs. Tracy, she lives in the next block, she seen it, and she ran over and

SPENT HALF AN HOUR BUYING A FRENCH DOLL.

signed a book, and the driver jumped on his wagon and went away, an', of course, the children seen the bundles an' nothin' would do but they must open 'em. That's all, sir; we didn't want to—I hope you don't think we'd steal 'em."

She was out of breath now, and the two children—the boy, a sturdy lad of ten, had come in—were staring, frightened, at the colonel. He looked at them a moment and then at the mother.

"I don't understand you, madam," he said. "I called to look at the house. It's for sale, you know."

He saw the look of anxiety pass from her homely face. The children, delighted with the reprieve, ran back to their splendid toys. He made a show of looking through the stuffy rooms, and when he was going gave each of the little ones a coin.

"Good-by, madam," he said to the mother. "You have two fine children."

And when he was in the cab again he stroked his gray mustache and chuckled:

"It was a lucky blunder, after all. I'll go down to the store in the morning and tell 'em it's all right."—Chicago Record-Herald.

### Not the Christmas Kind.

It is not the rainy-day stocking that gets hung up at Christmas.—Judge.

## NATURE IS WONDERFUL.

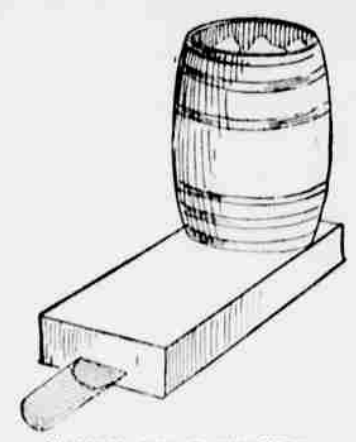
**There Is Reason for the Special Shape and Texture for Every Leaf in Existence.**

Even the most cursory observer of vegetable life must have been struck with the various forms of leaves. Why they should be so variously formed does not, however, often suggest itself, though there is a reason for the special shape and texture of almost every leaf in existence. Plants, such as grasses, daffodils and others which usually grow in clusters, have generally narrow leaves growing upright, so as not to overshade one another. Other plants of isolated habits have arrangement of foliage which secures to themselves the space of ground necessary for their development. The daisy, dandelion, shepherd's purse—which may mostly be seen in pastures—are examples of this. A circle of broad leaves pressed against the ground, forming what is known as the rosette growth, effectually bars the approach of any other plant, and keeps clear from all other roots the space of ground necessary to its own nutriment. Floating leaves and leaves of marsh plants are usually of simple outline, for, having no competitors, they are not liable to get in one another's light. Submerged plants have mostly leaves of narrow segment—the reason for which is not very well understood, although it is assumed by naturalists that it is for the purpose of exposing as large a surface as possible, in order to extract the minute proportion of carbonic acid dissolved in a vast bulk of water. Leaves on the boughs of trees are often much divided, so as to fold easily, to prevent their being rent and torn by the wind, while the glossy surface of evergreens is intended to throw off the rain and dew, which might freeze on them, and so cause injury to the tissues. Wonderful are the ways of Nature, and the study of her strange secrets unending.—Agricultural Epitomist.

## HOME-SMOKED MEATS.

**When Properly Cured They Are Superior in Quality to the Product of Packing Houses.**

Many of the farmers in the east cure hams for home use. The quality is much better than the product sent out by the packing houses. Set a clean sugar barrel on a box four feet long, one foot high, and wide enough



HANDY MEAT SMOKER.

for the barrel. Bore auger holes through the box under the barrel to let the smoke through. Make a hole in the ground under the front end of the box, so that the fire made on a piece of tin could be shoved under the box. A half head of a barrel can be crowded down by the end of the box, closing the fire hole. All crevices must be banked with dirt to keep the smoke in. Drive strong wire nails near the top of the barrel to hang the hams on. Place a strong paper or canvas over the top of the barrel and add enough bags or blankets to keep the smoke in.—Farm and Home.

### Flax Seed for Cattle.

Prof. Henry, who has made such extensive experiments in feeding, says: "Stockmen who have fed flax seed to horses and cattle report satisfactory results from its use. Frequently some flax seed is left in the straw, which increases its value. There seems no foundation for the statement that the fiber of flax straw forms balls of indigestible matter in the stomach of farm animals." We would suppose that in order to secure the most nutriment in the straw it should be cut about the time the pods are of full size, but before they commence to ripen.—Rural World.

### Danger in High Roosts.

High roosts cause bumble foot. While it is natural for all hens to roost high, it is only when the grass covered ground is at hand that the bird is safe from danger of injury to the feet. In most cases six inches above the dropping board is right. If the dropping board has a raised edge a bird can step from one to the other and then easily to the floor. The board itself should be high enough to allow an egg box underneath. If there is no other place for the hens to roost they will accept the low roost, thereby avoiding the one that is higher. —Cincinnati Poultry.

The muscles of a horse used for heavy work become used to heavy strain, but are not accustomed to quick motion. Remember this when tempted to drive fast.